

**Information Paper**

**Children and Youth  
Information Development  
Plan - Project Plan**

**Australia**

**2005**

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AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

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## **1. Introduction**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has a continuing commitment to develop the quality of official statistical information and work collaboratively with a range of government agencies to deliver the statistics required by Australians, no matter what their source. Key components of this work include the creation of information development plans. Information development plans are living documents which map the broad issues and information needs for a given field to the available information sources, in order to determine information gaps, overlaps and deficiencies. These plans present priorities and a plan for action to improve information agreed by stakeholders. They provide a framework for the systematic improvement, integration and use of data sources.

In this context, the ABS National Children and Youth Statistics Unit (NCYSU) is reviewing the information on children and youth. This work is being undertaken with a view to improving the quality and quantity of data available on this population group and facilitating access to this data.

It is clear, even at this stage in the Information Development Plan (IDP), that new data and studies may need to be developed in order to improve the information set available in various priority areas of children and youth statistics. Opportunities also exist to improve the breadth and value of currently available data in a range of ways including better use of administrative by-product data along with surveys and censuses. These avenues will be explored in detail during the course of the project.

Providing solutions via the design of new surveys or enhancing existing data sources will be the responsibility of a range of organisations. As the national statistical agency, the ABS is well placed to identify priorities and work with other agencies to develop a plan to improve the range of information required.

The work of the NCYSU, including the IDP, is being undertaken with the guidance of the Children and Youth Statistics Advisory Group (CYSAG). A list of organisations included on CYSAG is in the Appendix.

## **2. Project vision**

The NCYSU has a vision of achieving two important goals through this work.

- 1) An improved body of data to better match information needs in the field of children and youth, with an enhanced understanding of data and increased accessibility and availability of information for all to assist informed decision making.
- 2) Active collaboration and coordination between the ABS and those working in the children and youth field, to improve the information available to support policy.

### **3. Information development work: objectives and priorities**

For the NCYSU this project will allow better identification of the key statistical priorities relating to children and youth and provide a mechanism for the ABS to engage in a dialogue with stakeholders in the field. This will help promote a wider shared understanding and commitment to statistical priorities relating to children and youth.

Primary objectives include:

- 1) The identification of current significant statistical issues related to children and youth data and agreement to act on these.
- 2) The investigation of data needs and sources relevant to the issues of importance for children and youth, and the identification of information gaps, deficiencies and overlaps in the existing data sets relating to children and youth.
- 3) The development of an agreed set of priorities with stakeholders to improve relevant children and youth statistics.
- 4) Reaching an agreement on the responsibilities for the various actions to improve the statistics.
- 5) An improvement in the use and capacity of existing information through mechanisms such as better sharing and access to information and promotion of the use of standards in surveys and administrative collections.

### **4. Rationale and timing**

The NCYSU has a leadership and coordination role in the field and the task of developing an IDP fits well with this role. In addition the Unit has resources available to undertake a sizeable portion of the work. Networks with key data providers and users are currently being expanded particularly through forums such as the *A Picture of Australia's Children* project which is drawing together major government agencies and non-government organisations in the field. Initiatives such as the National Data Network and research network projects (which involve the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth) are also drawing together researchers, research organisations and other non-government bodies in the field.

It is also an opportune time for this project given the key policy directions that relate to children and youth. At a national level, these include:

- the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*, which provides the framework for the development and implementation of the federal government's commitment to help support and strengthen families as a fundamental unit of society. This policy aims to combine delivery of services and policies and services for families in transition or need. Specific objectives include reducing

family breakdowns, better integration of government services, development of youth policy and improved monitoring of program performance and improved service delivery;

- the *National Agenda for Early Childhood*, which is the federal government's policy for addressing children and their needs in early development. Although still in its development stages, the *Agenda* sets directions and actions for how parents can best be supported and how young children's needs can be met. It also aims to raise public awareness regarding the importance of the early childhood years and address the underlying social and economic factors that affect young children. Key action areas already identified are: Healthy young families; supporting families and parents; early learning and care; and creating child-friendly communities;
- the federal government's policy framework on young people, which covers their health, wellbeing and development, and is articulated in the *Living Choices* statement. This emphasises the importance of reaching adult independence and supporting social and economic participation; and
- the *Australians Working Together* initiative, which includes specific help for youth with work experience, learning new skills, education and training and looking for work.

The commitment of both national and international agencies working in the field of children and youth is demonstrated by the recent release of several statistical compendium publications. These publications include: *Census of Population and Housing: Australia's Youth* (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004); *Australia's Young People: Their Health and Wellbeing, 2003* and *Australia's Children: Their Health and Wellbeing, 2002* (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare); *The Wellbeing of Canada's Young Children: Government of Canada Report 2002*; *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Wellbeing 2003*; and *The Health of Children and Young People* (Office of National Statistics 2004).

## 5. Key steps in the project

This project will involve a number of key steps— first, defining key concepts and policy concerns, and then determining existing data sources and information needs, so that a draft set of priorities can be developed for consultation. Following this consultation a draft IDP will be developed, as a living document, outlining current priorities, actions to address them, and responsible agencies. This will provide the basis for monitoring progress and ongoing review of information development needs.

To date, through a review of available literature, consultation with selected stakeholders, and participation in current information activities for children and youth outside the ABS, eight key issues relating to children and youth have been identified. In addition existing statistical frameworks and standards relating to children and youth have been documented. This work has resulted in two papers— *Information Paper: Key Issues Relating to Children and Youth* and *Information Paper: Field of Children and Youth Statistics*.

IDPs drawn up by other areas of the ABS were also used as a source of information and ideas, particularly those relating to cross-cutting areas of social concern such as health, education and work. This has reduced the potential for duplication of effort in this work across the ABS. The key policy drivers have also been identified. The scope of further user consultation will be considered and the project work will be promoted within and outside of the ABS through a range of mediums, including the Unit's regular newsletter (*Children and Youth News*).

A consultation paper is being drafted and will include a questionnaire for collecting information regarding stakeholder's information development priorities. The paper will be sent out to stakeholders in March 2005. A Children and Youth IDP Steering Committee, nominated by the CYSAG, is guiding this work. A draft IDP will be available in September 2005 and will be circulated among stakeholders for comment. The final IDP is expected to be released in December 2005.

### **5.1. Defining children and youth**

The field of children and youth encompasses a diverse population group. Children are often defined by their age, but dependency (e.g. economic, physical, emotional, etc.) is an important consideration in determining someone's status as a child. Common age ranges chosen to represent the period of childhood are 0-11/12/14/18 years. The age ranges chosen are often based around education levels. In addition, subgroups of children are often chosen according to developmental milestones (e.g. 0-6 months, or 0-1/2/5/8 years). Sometimes age cut-offs indicating the end of childhood are concerned with the age at which children finish compulsory education and can legally enter full-time employment (compulsory schooling is to age 15 years in all Australian states and territories, except Tasmania where it is 16). Because of this the ABS has often used 0-14 years to represent children in many statistical outputs, with labour force statistics starting at age 15 years. However, 0-14 years has not been proclaimed an official ABS standard for defining children per se.

There can also be varying start and end points to the age range chosen to represent youth. Sometimes the age ranges chosen to represent children and youth overlap. The age range at which youth ends often revolves around a person's participation in full-time education and is thus linked to the concept of economic dependency. The ABS uses many age ranges to identify the youth population in its data, but 15-24 years is the most common, because of the level of economic dependency that occurs at these ages (as a result of youth participation in education). The definitions and concepts surrounding children and youth are explored in greater detail in the IDP paper titled, *Information Paper: Field of Children and Youth Statistics*.

## 5.2. The main outputs

The NCYSU has developed an approach to identifying and developing the information available on children and youth. A series of outputs to be produced by the Unit will underpin this work. These outputs will be released to external stakeholders and are proposed to be disseminated electronically, via the National Children and Youth Statistics Unit theme page and include:

### 1) *Information Paper: Children and Youth Information Development Plan - Project Plan*

This project plan outlines the work to be undertaken and the rationale for it.

### 2) *Information Paper: Key Issues Relating to Children and Youth*

This document details the key issues relating to children and youth and the policies that apply. The document discusses the over-arching policies, and for each key issue the main questions surrounding it are identified. Data sources applicable to each issue are mentioned with details given in an appendix.

### 3) *Information Paper: Field of Children and Youth Statistics*

This represents a field of statistics document, which covers the scope of the field and the key concepts and statistical tools that apply to it. In broad terms the document introduces the frameworks and the policy context that has applied to the field of children and youth. It covers key concepts such as age and development, dependency and childhood. For youth, the social and legal responsibilities they face discussed. Children and youth discussed in an international context. Applicable frameworks and standards from ABS and other major statistical agencies are documented.

### 4) *Information Priorities in the Children and Youth Field: A Consultation Paper and Questionnaire*

This document is to be provided to IDP stakeholders. It will collect information regarding stakeholder's priority information needs including data gaps, deficiencies and overlaps in the children and youth field. The paper will collect information regarding current and proposed statistical development activity by stakeholders. It will also remind stakeholders of the context of the IDP, and provide a summary of the key stakeholders and their information holdings. The paper will collect information using a questionnaire for return to the NCYSU.

### 5) *Information Development Plan: first draft*

The first draft of the Information Development Plan will include the detail of information development needs gleaned from the first round of the consultation phase, which will have a national focus. It will also document both existing development activities and propose new development activities and responsibilities

for this information development and timeframes for the various stakeholders. Stakeholders will be invited to comment on this draft.

#### 6) *Information Paper: Improving Statistics on Children and Youth*

Building on the draft IDP, this final draft will be a living document bringing together the conceptual frameworks around children and youth, the key policy issues, and agreed information development priorities. It will incorporate input from the broader stakeholder community, including state government departments and agencies. It will present a work plan for future years agreed by all stakeholders. Key projects underway and the agencies responsible for progressing these projects will be described as part of this work plan. As well, it will highlight agreed information development priorities and steps needed to address them.

### 6. Time line and project deliverables

The table below highlights the main deliverables and associated timing for this project. It should be noted that only the Information Development Plan (deliverable 6, below) is intended to be formally published under an ABS catalogue number (in late 2005).

	<i>Deliverable</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
1.	Information Paper: Children and Youth Information Development Plan - Project Plan Draft presented and discussed at CYSAG Finalise (and link to NCYSU theme page)	October 2004 February 2005
2.	Information Paper: Key Issues Relating to Children and Youth Consultation draft circulated for feedback Draft presented and discussed at CYSAG Finalise (and link to NCYSU theme page)	July 2004 October 2004 February 2005
3.	Information Paper: Field of Children and Youth Statistics Draft presented and discussed at CYSAG Finalise (and link to NCYSU theme page)	October 2004 February 2005
4.	Information Priorities in the Children and Youth Field: A Consultation Paper and Questionnaire	Release March 2005
5.	Information Development Plan – First draft	Release September 2005
6.	Information Paper: Improving Statistics on Children and Youth	December 2005

## **7. Stakeholders**

The NCYSU recognises that there are many stakeholders in the field of children and youth. Some have roles in terms of policy development and implementation, some also have significant information holdings, while others contribute through research. The NCYSU acknowledges the various roles that are played by these organisations and aims to work collaboratively with them to ensure appropriate and timely information development.

There have been ongoing consultations with key stakeholders on aspects of this project, many through other ABS work groups which have developed IDPs that overlap the field of children and youth. There is also significant stakeholder overlap in the field of children and youth. Consultation will be carefully coordinated to minimise and manage this overlap.

## Appendix—Organisations represented on the Children and Youth Statistics Advisory Group

<i>Stakeholder organisation</i>	<i>Organisation's role in the field</i>
<i>Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC)</i>	The AIC is the national agency involved in the study of crime and criminal justice in Australia and for the dissemination of criminal justice information. The Institute draws on information supplied to it by a wide variety of sources and its policy advice is objective and independent. AIC is a data custodian for a wide variety of data, including juvenile crime and justice.
<i>Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)</i>	The AIFS was established in 1980 to promote the identification and understanding of factors affecting marital and family stability in Australia. AIFS has a role in informing and influencing policy development, public understanding and informed debate about factors affecting family functioning and wellbeing. AIFS has a research program with a focus on children and parenting, family and marriage, and family and society. They manage the Growing up in Australia study; the National Child Protection Clearinghouse; and the Stronger Families Learning Exchange.
<i>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)</i>	AIHW, which was established in 1987, is Australia's national agency for health and welfare statistics and information. AIHW leads national health and welfare information management and data development, through the National Health Information Management Group, the National Community Services Information Management Group and the National Indigenous Housing Information Implementation Group. AIHW is responsible for key compendiums in the children and youth field. The AIHW are also custodians of key administrative data sets relating to children, youth and families and coordinate and manage their development.
<i>Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)</i>	ARACY is a national collaboration of researchers, policy makers and practitioners from a broad range of disciplines who are working together to build a better future for Australia's children and youth. ARACY has been formed with the intention of pooling efforts, particularly information sharing and collaboration, within the children and youth field. Key initiatives include the National Data Network and the formation of

	the Australian Research Network.
<i>Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)</i>	DEST develops and implements policies to ensure the continuing relevance of education, science and training to contemporary needs and the growing requirement for lifelong learning. DEST is responsible for the Higher Education Statistics Collection and schools data for non-government schools.
<i>Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)</i>	DEWR develops and implements policies and programs that support an effectively functioning labour market, and workplaces with higher productivity and higher pay. DEWR also provides services to job seekers, employers, employees and researchers.
<i>Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS)</i>	DFaCS is responsible for a broad range of social policy issues affecting Australian society and the living standards of Australian families, communities and individuals. DFaCS has three key policy social outcomes; Families are Strong, Communities are Strong and Individuals Reach Their Potential. DFaCS fund the Growing up in Australia study, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey.
<i>Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA)</i>	DoHA has nine portfolio outcomes - population health and safety, access to Medicare, enhanced quality of life for older Australians, quality health care, rural health, hearing services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, choice through private health and health investment. As well as being the main department responsible for government policy relating to health outcomes for children and youth it is also closely involved in several important data holdings, such as the National Drug Strategy Household Surveys and the Illicit Drugs Reporting System.

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